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ABSTRACT

Since 1996, the Annenberg Public Policy Center (APPC) has tracked and reported the availability and the quality of programming specifically designed for children. This report evaluates the availability and quality of children's programming in the 1998-99 season and examines factors that may have influenced the quality and quantity of programming. The first part reviews a decade of significant changes in children's television and the influence of those changes on the current state of programming, including the regulatory environment, economic environment, industry structure, and internal constraints. An analysis of the current state of children's programming in the Philadelphia market is presented in the second part. Factors examined include venue, time, audience, educational content, character diversity, violence, language, sexual innuendo/provocative dress, and quality. The third part summarizes the findings and discusses the implications of this research for children's television in the next millennium. Appendices include a table of APPC high quality programs, intercoder reliability coefficients, programming venues, and an outline of programming features for children of different ages. (Contains 38 references and 38 endnotes.) (AEF)

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THE ANNENBERG PUBLIC POLICY CENTER OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

The 1999 State of Children's Television Report

Programming for Children Over Broadcast and Cable Television

By Emory H. Woodard, IV, Ph.D.
The Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania

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Report Series No. 28

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ABOUT THE ANNENBERG PUBLIC POLICY CENTER

The Annenberg Public Policy Center was established by publisher and philanthropist Walter Annenberg in 1994 to create a community of scholars within the University of Pennsylvania that would address public policy issues at the local, state, and federal levels. Consistent with the mission of the Annenberg School for Communication, the Center has four ongoing foci: Information and Society, Media and the Developing Mind, Media and the Dialogue of Democracy, and Health Communication. Each year, as well, a special area of scholarly interest is addressed. The Center supports research and sponsors lectures and conferences in these areas. This series of publications disseminates the work of the Center.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *1999 State of Children's Television Report* represents the fourth consecutive year in which researchers at the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania have conducted a comprehensive analysis of the programming for children available in a large urban market over the course of one week (for previous reports see Jordan, 1996; Jordan and Woodard, 1997; and Jordan, 1998). This report provides insight on both the availability and the quality of programming specifically designed for child audiences.

The evaluation of programs airing for children over broadcast and cable channels during one week reveals that...

- **There are more shows than ever (a 12 percent increase over last year) airing on more venues than ever.** Children whose families have access to broadcast television and also subscribe to cable can choose from 29 different channels that air 1,324 shows (279 unique titles) specifically designed for them over the course of one week.

- **The largest increase in programming is in the proportion of shows aired on basic cable venues.** Last year basic cable channels aired 50 percent of children's programs; this year they account for 55 percent of children's shows. Those who had an abundant supply of children's programming last year have even more this year.

- **Though there are more programs available for children, there is also a significant amount of turnover in children's program titles.** Between 19 and 26 percent of the program titles are dropped from the schedule and replaced with other programming.

- **The explosion of programs is not the result of a burgeoning production community.** Though many new shows are airing, one still sees a large percentage of shows from the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

- **There are still relatively few programs available for children during prime-time hours (7:00 pm to 10:00 pm) when children are most likely to view television.** Last year less than 13 percent of programs were available during prime-time, this year only six percent are available during that time slot.

- **The elementary school-aged audience still appears to be the audience of choice for programmers.** Slightly up from previous years when nearly two-thirds of all programs were produced for five-to-eleven year-olds, this year nearly three-quarters of programs are made for elementary school-aged children.

- **The overall quality of children's television shows signs of modest improvement.**

  Fewer children's programs contain no enriching content. Last year, 46 percent of children's programs were without enriching content; this year only 25 percent had no enriching content.

  While the proportion of high quality programs was virtually unchanged from last year (36 percent were high quality last year and 37 percent are high quality this year), the proportion of low quality programs has dropped from 36 percent last year to 26 percent in this year's analysis.

Programs aired during the 1998/99 season that were produced since 1990 are of a higher overall quality than programs produced before 1990. Programs produced more recently tend to have more educational and less violent content than shows produced earlier.

Programs with clear and salient lessons tend to appear most frequently on PBS, but many of those stations that air smaller blocks of programs (e.g., the broadcast networks) devote their entire children's programming schedule to educational fare.

- **The best programs are still made for the preschool-aged audience.** Three-fourths of preschoolers' shows are high quality and one-third of shows for elementary school-aged and adolescent-aged children are high quality. High quality programs are still most likely to air on PBS stations and least likely to air on broadcast weblet and independent stations.

- **There are only three high quality programs designed for children airing during prime-time hours when children are most likely to view.** Other top-rated programs among children that are not specifically designed for them are not generally terrible. In fact, they are significantly less violent than the programs specifically designed for children.

- **Violence remains a problem.** Twenty-eight percent of children's shows contain four or more instances of violence, considered "a lot" in this analysis. Moreover, three-quarters of these shows with "a lot" of violence did not receive the FV (fantasy violence) rating to alert parents to the violent nature of the programs' content. Also, ten percent of children's programs did not receive age-ratings.

- **Less problematic but present nevertheless are the 45 percent of children's programs that contain one or more instances of problematic language and 12 percent of programs that contain one or more instances of sexual innuendo.** The good news is that the proportion of low quality programs, those with violence, inappropriate language, and sexual innuendo appears to be on the decline from the previous season.

- **Given the findings of this research, a number of recommendations are in order.** First, more broadcasters and cablecasters should follow the example of Nickelodeon and Disney and air quality programming during the prime-time viewing hours when children are in the audience. Second, there needs to be more consistency in the information provided through the current ratings system. Parents need reliable ratings that tell them what is in the shows and for which of their children a show is appropriate. Finally, outreach to parents is necessary.

- **Questions raised by this research include the following:** 1) What is the educational value of youth- or family-oriented programming aired during prime-time that is not specifically designed for children? 2) How are children making their programming decisions?

INTRODUCTION

Despite competition from various media, including computers, the Internet, and video games, television still figures prominently in the lives of children. In 1998, Nielsen Media Research reported children between the ages of two and eleven watched an average of two hours and 57 minutes of television on a daily basis, just over 20 1/2 hours every week or almost 1,100 hours for the year (Television Bureau of Advertising Inc., 1998). Similarly, our research (Stanger & Gridina, 1999) indicates that in 1999 children between the ages of 10 and 17 watch about two and a half hours of television daily or just about 1,000 hours each year.[1] To place that use in context, the average child only spends about 1,000 hours in school every year (U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics, 1996). Though television is such a prominent feature in the lives of children, sentiments toward the medium are somewhat mixed. Some worry that the medium skews children's view of the world and contributes to their aggressive tendencies. They point to the recent acts of school violence as unfortunate but expected outcomes of viewing television, particularly its violent offerings. Others remind us of the potential of the medium and point to educational programs which have enhanced literacy skills, made children "school-ready," and affected positive social and emotional development (Huston & Wright, 1998).

Since 1996, the Annenberg Public Policy Center has tracked the availability and the quality of programming specifically designed for children and reported the findings in the annual State of Children's Television report. In this, the final State of Children's Television report of the millennium, the availability and quality of children's programming available in the 1998/99 season are evaluated. In addition to reporting on the quantity and quality of children's programming, the report also examines factors that may have influenced the quality and quantity of programming. The paper concludes with recommendations on how we can better understand and improve children's television. These thoughts can be summarized in the three research questions that guided the research:

What are the influences on the current state of children's television?

What is the state of children's television?

What should we do about the state of children's television?

This report answers these questions in three sections. Part One reviews a decade of significant changes in children's television and the influence of those changes on the current state of programming. Part Two presents an analysis of the current state of children's programming in the Philadelphia market. Part Three summarizes the findings and discusses the implications of the 1999 research for children's television in the next millennium.

PART ONE: INFLUENCES ON THE STATE OF CHILDREN'S TELEVISION

To understand children's television, one must begin with the complex nexus of factors that shape it. In one of the more lucent descriptions of the complexities of children's television, Wartella (1994) describes four elements that shape what children see on television: the regulatory environment, the economic environment, the industry structure, and the internal constraints. Each will be discussed in light of the current state of children's television.

Regulatory Environment

Children's Television Act of 1990

A first important impact on the current state of children's television has been the tremendous change in the regulation of children's television. After decades of public and legislative debate, volumes of research, and the significant efforts of various advocacy groups, a policy shift occurred with the Children's Television Act of 1990 (CTA) when the first national legislation directed at children's television was passed (Wartella, 1994). Implemented January 1, 1992, the Act made three primary provisions:

1) Every broadcast station was required to air programming that "furthers the positive development of the child in any respect, including the child's cognitive/intellectual or emotional/social needs" in order to qualify for license renewal (Federal Communications Commission, 1991, p. 2114).
2) Advertising on children's programs was limited to 12 minutes per hour on weekdays and 10.5 minutes per hour on weekends. Program-length commercials were effectively banned from children's television.
3) The National Endowment for Children's Educational Television was established.

The National Endowment for Children's Educational Television (NECET) funded a number of successful educational programs such as *Arthur* and *The Eddie Files*. Unfortunately, Congress has not appropriated funds for NECET since 1995. At least some broadcast stations have made significant strides toward curtailing the advertising aired during children's programming. The FCC has fined a number of stations that have failed to comply, although the fines have been nominal in relation to the revenues made by the prohibited advertisements. The development that most belied the spirit of CTA was the apparent confusion over how stations were to satisfy their obligation to the public interest and provide programming that furthered the positive development of children. Kunkel and Canepa's (1994) review of compliance revealed stations were doing little better at providing educational programming for children after the implementation of the regulation than they were 15-20 years prior to the regulation.

Television Program Ratings and the V-Chip

The Telecommunications Act of 1996, enacted February 8, 1996, was an omnibus bill that simultaneously deregulated much of the telecommunications industry and offered parents a means of gaining greater control of the television content that comes into the home. The legislation offered parents greater control in two ways: 1) It encouraged a voluntary rating system of television content; and 2) It called for V-Chip technology.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC), in an official Report and Order (FCC 98-36) released on March 12, 1997, adopted technical rules that require television receivers with screens 13 inches or larger sold in the U.S. to be equipped with a "V-Chip" that will allow parents to block the display of unwanted programming. According to the guidelines of the order, set manufacturers will have to include the V-Chip in at least half of their television receivers by July 1, 1999, and all receivers by January 1, 2000.

The technology works with the "TV Parental Guidelines," a voluntary rating system[2] developed by the television industry, consisting of six descriptive labels. The system categorizes shows on the basis of age and/or maturity; sexual situations, violence, language or dialogue. The age ratings include the following: TV-Y (all children), TV-Y7 (ages seven and above), TV-G (general audience), TV-PG (parental guidance suggested), TV-14 (parents strongly cautioned) and TV-MA (mature audiences only). The content ratings are V- violence, S- sexual situations, L- coarse language, or D- some suggestive dialogue. All of these content ratings apply specifically to adult programs. The only content rating for children's programming (rated TV-Y7) is an FV for fantasy violence.

The V-Chip will read information encoded in the program and block content based on either the overall age category; the FV, S, L, V, D rating assigned; or by a combination of the two, as determined by parents.

The "Three-Hour Rule"

Finally, in a ruling released on August 8, 1996, the FCC presented new rules that strengthened and clarified how broadcasters are expected to comply with the Children's Television Act. The rules covered the definition of educational programming, the minimum amount of such programming required each week, on- and off-air labeling of educational children's programs, and new mechanisms for public accountability. For a more complete exposition of the Three-Hour Rule please see Jordan (1999).

Briefly, the rules require that stations broadcast a minimum of three hours of educational programming each week that somehow meets the educational and informational needs of children 16 years of age and younger. The programs must be designed for a target age group, have a clear educational objective, be at least 30 minutes in length, and be regularly scheduled between the hours of 7:00 am and 10:00 pm. In addition to these requirements, the programs must be identified as educational both on-air and to television listing services such as *TV Guide*. To increase station accountability to the public, stations must maintain a public file of their educational offerings and have a staff member available to answer any questions members of the public may have about the programming.

Economic Environment

The second major influence on the state of children's television is the economic environment. Children's television has shared in the general economic prosperity of the times. In 1998, children's advertising expenditures were up 13.5 percent from the previous year to $1.13 billion in revenue completing five consecutive years of growth. Some industry speculators suggest that 1999 will not be as prosperous as previous years based on up front advertising purchases for the year and a poorly performing toy industry (McConville, 1999b). However, upfront sales were down last year before the market turned in its best growth in the five year span. Moreover, as one industry observer noted, the real money in the children's television industry is in licensing and merchandising, international sales, and home video (Spring, 1999). For instance, *Pokemon* a popular syndicated program has grown into an international industry that includes trading cards, comic books, plastic figurines, virtual pets, bean-bag toys, lunch boxes, T-shirts and compact disks, with total sales so far of nearly $5 billion in its short three year existence (King, 1999). Educational programs also enjoy alternative revenue streams as *Sesame Street's* Tickle Me Elmo doll reportedly earned $107 million in about a year and a half (mid-1996 through 1998) (King, 1999).

Industry Structure

The third influence on the state of children's television is the industry structure. The market for children's eyeballs has grown increasingly competitive over the last few years (Jordan, 1999). Currently there are four full-time children's cable networks, Nickelodeon, Disney Channel, Cartoon Network, and the Fox Family Channel. On February 2, 1999 Children's Television Workshop and Nickelodeon launched its joint venture, Noggin, a commercial-free children's network that features educational programming around the clock. While plans are in the works to have it carried by local cable providers, the channel is currently distributed to about two million homes primarily through the EchoStar satellite system (Petrozzello, 1999). Also added to the crowded field are the broadcast networks, Kids' WB and Fox Kids. Toon Disney is a digital network spin-off of the Disney Channel that is already in ten million mostly analog cable and satellite households (McClellan & Tedesco, 1999). In addition to these concentrated efforts to reach the child audience, various broadcast networks, weblets, and independents, and basic and premium cable channels also air children's shows. There are numerous plans in the works for even more children's programming outlets. For instance, Fox will launch two cable channels, one for boys called Boyz and one for girls called Girlz within the year.

While the competition for the attention of the child audience for television is growing fiercer, the child audience's attention to television is steadily declining. Though television viewing is still a prominent part of children's lives as stated earlier, some data indicate it is less so than just a few years ago. Nielsen Media Research suggests children's television viewing has decreased about 15 percent since 1989. [3] The declining viewership should serve to intensify competition.

When children do tune in, they are likely to watch the offerings of Nickelodeon, followed by the Cartoon Network. The share of the child audience for Nickelodeon is just over 50 percent while the Cartoon Network has just over a quarter of the audience. The rest of the venues for children's programming capture less than 10 percent of the audience each (McClellan & Tedesco, 1999). This is understandable as Nickelodeon and the Cartoon Network air children's shows throughout their programming day where most of the other venues do not.

Internal Constraints

The final influences on the current state of children's television are internal constraints. These include the network executives' and producers' perspectives of their audience and the practices they employ to provide programming for the child audience (Wartella, 1994). A 1996 survey (Jordan, 1996) of industry personnel uncovered four general perceptions. First, it was widely held that children outgrow "educational programming" by the time they are six. Second, it was believed the only way to provide educational content to the older child is to skip the academic and focus on the social. Third, some thought it was more expensive and more difficult to create educational programs than entertainment programs. Finally, a number of industry executives thought it was better to gear programs to a boy audience than a girl audience or a mixed audience. A 1999 update of conventional wisdom suggests that industry executives have progressed significantly from these monolithic views of the child audience and that many in the commercial broadcast sector have become increasingly sensitive to the educational needs of the child audience (Jordan, 1999).

The changes in the regulatory environment, the economic environment, the industry structure, and the internal constraints all indicate an increase in the quality of children's programming this year. The "Three-Hour Rule" should raise the number of educational programs available over the years before its implementation. The economic prosperity should free investment capital for quality programming. The industry structure should make for increased competition that in turn should lead to more quality programming. Finally, industry executives more aware of the needs of children should be more capable of doing what is necessary to produce quality programming. The next section examines whether or not this expectation for greater quality was realized in the 1998/99 season.

PART TWO: EVALUATING THE AVAILABILITY, CONTENT AND QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S PROGRAMMING

Sample

The 1999 sample of children's television programs was taken from the Philadelphia media market, one of the largest in the country. While the sample is not representative of programming in the entire country, the low proportion of locally produced programs suggests that much of what is aired in Philadelphia is indicative of what is available in other media markets from national broadcast and cable networks and syndicators. The sample reflects a composite week's worth of programming designed specifically for the child audience aired over commercial broadcast, public broadcast, basic cable, and premium cable channels in the 1998/99 season.

As with all television fare, children's programming changes significantly over the course of a season. A preliminary analysis was conducted to determine just how much the programming varied over the course of a season. Using the electronic listings of *TV Guide Online* and the print directory *Kidsnet*,[4] three sample weeks of children's programming were collected, one at the beginning of the "first run" season, one in the middle of the season, and one near the end of the "first run" season. The first sample, collected between September 16, 1998 and September 23, 1998, had 1,417 children's programs and 343 unique titles. Seventy-eight percent of those shows were still airing in sample week 2. The second sample, collected the week of December 2, 1998 through December 9, 1998, had 1,243 shows for children. There were 354 unique titles in this sample, 93 of which were new programs introduced in the interim period. Only 74 percent of these programs were still airing when the third sample week was collected. The third sample week, collected between March 3, 1999 and March 10, 1999 had 1,355 programs. This represented 301 unique titles and 58 new shows. Though these samples were not adjusted for movies, specials, and non-English programs, however, they still indicate that there is a lot of movement in programs over the course of a season. According to the programs reported to television listings services, shows are constantly being introduced, dropped, and rearranged making it difficult to get a fix on what is available for children.

The fluctuation of the season made random sampling difficult. The sampling unit was program title as indicated by the second sample week. The sampling frame reflected 15 weeks of children's programming based on the schedule for all channels, noting the broadcast day, time, and duration of each program available during the second sample week. As schedules changed, titles were resampled to preserve the randomness of the selection. At least one instance of every title, randomly selected over the course of 15 weeks was video recorded. Only regularly scheduled programs lasting a minimum of 30 minutes were included in the sample for further analysis. Movies, specials, short-form programs, interstitials, and non-English language programs were excluded from the study. The final composite week was compiled by duplicating the coding decisions made for each unique title the total number of times the program was scheduled to air over the course of one week. For instance, the video recorded episode of *Mister Roger's Neighborhood* was coded once and then the coding decisions made for that one episode were duplicated 14 times for the 14 times the show airs on PBS stations in Philadelphia. The analyses in this report are based on this weighted data set, unless otherwise noted.

Procedures

A seven member coding team intensively trained over an eight-week period analyzed individual program titles. The coding team consisted of five undergraduate students, one doctoral student, and the author of this report. All of the students major in communication at the Annenberg School for Communication of the University of Pennsylvania. A sample of over 25 percent of the programs (n=83) was independently double-coded in order to assess the reliability of the measures. The variables reported

below all achieved acceptable levels of reliability. Reliability scores are listed in Appendix B. After achieving satisfactory reliability, the remaining programs were then coded over a four week period.

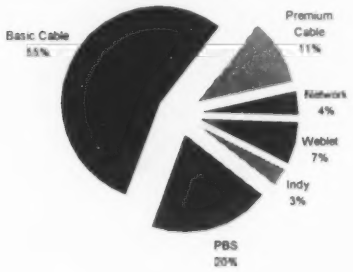
Results

The final composite week of children's programming consisted of 1,324 programs. This is up 12 percent from last year's 1997/98 season composite week of programming (n=1,190). There were a total of 279 unique titles in the sample week aired over 29 broadcast and cable channels.

Where Can Children Find Programs?

The venue with the most children's programs was the Cartoon Network with 269 shows aired over one week followed by PBS offerings (there were four PBS stations in the market, WHYY, WLVT, WYBE, WNJN) with 265 programs. Nickelodeon came in third with 187 shows in a week. Speaking more generally, basic cable channels air the most children's programs (55 percent), followed by PBS stations (20 percent).

Figure 1: Distribution of Children's Programs by Venue



The major commercial networks (ABC, CBS, Fox, and NBC) only air about four percent of the programs for children. Figure 1 graphically displays program distribution while Appendix C presents the specific channels within each of the venue categories. The proportion of children's programs aired on basic cable has steadily increased over the years of our monitoring of children's programs. In our 1996/97 composite week sample, basic cable accounted for 39 percent of children's programs (Jordan & Woodard, 1997), and in the 1997/98 sample basic cable accounted for 50 percent of the shows (Jordan, 1998). This means that increasingly children without cable are able to access less of the available programs specifically designed for them.

When Can Children Find Programs?

Children's programs can be found every day of the week and virtually around the clock. Unlike the ghetto of children's programming on Saturday mornings of just over a decade ago (Wartella, 1994), children's programs are aired throughout the week. In fact, in the 1998/99-season weekend days averaged 129 children's programs and weekday days averaged 213 shows. Indeed children's shows were more likely to be aired Monday through Friday than on Saturday or Sunday as illustrated in Figure 2.

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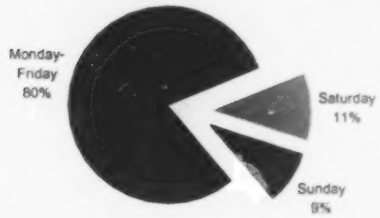
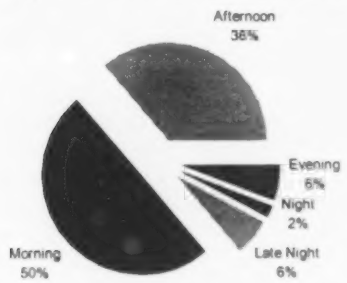
Figure 2: Days on Which Children's Programs Air



The morning remains a popular time to air children's shows and prime-time children's programming is virtually nonexistent. A full 50 percent of children's shows were aired during morning hours (between 5:00 am and 12 noon), 36 percent were aired in the afternoon/early evening (between 12 noon – 6:00 pm), six percent were aired during the evening, prime-time hours (between 7:00 pm – 10:00 pm), and two percent air at night (between 10:00 pm and 12 midnight). Though it is not clear whose children would be in the audience, six percent of children's programs aired in the late night/early morning slot between 12 midnight and 5:00 am. Prime-time programming for children was down more than 50 percent from last year's offerings (Jordan, 1998). The highest percentage of children view during prime-time hours (between 25 and 45 percent depending on the age of the child and the day of viewing).[5] The reduction in already sparse prime time programs means there is even less programming designed for children to watch when they watch.

Figure 3: Distribution of Children's Programs by Time



For whom are the programs produced?

The age ratings described earlier provide a useful means of determining the audience targeted by children's programs in the 1998/99 sample. Rating information for two percent of the programs was not available due to video recording difficulties (e.g., recording started after ratings were displayed). Of those programs for which ratings information was available, 10 percent of the programs were still not being rated by their stations. Of those programs not given age ratings, 57 percent was PBS shows, 21 percent were independent broadcast programs, and 20 percent were basic cable shows.[6] The rest were scattered throughout the remaining venues. Of those programs that did receive a rating, 50 percent received a TV-Y rating, 15 percent received a TV-Y7 rating, and 24 percent received a TV-G rating. Less than one percent of the shows received a rating other than a TV-Y, TV-Y7, or TV-G.

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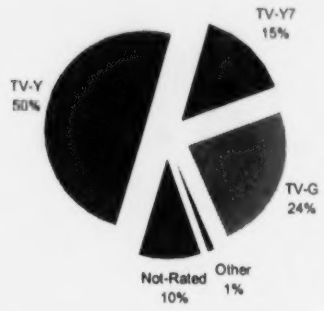
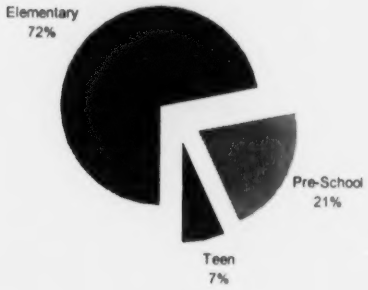
Figure 4: Distribution of Age Ratings



In addition to noting the posted age-rating of the programs, coders assessed the target age for each show. The range of target audiences included the preschool-age audience (ages 2-4), the elementary school-age audience (ages 5-11), and the teen audience (12-16). To determine the target age, coders used three criteria: the substance and the form of the content, the age of the program's characters and the time at which the program aired. For guidelines on how the substance and the form of programs were used to assess target age, please refer to Appendix D. In terms of the age of the characters, a preponderance of younger characters (six and under) indicated a pre-school target; older characters suggested an older audience. Conventional wisdom in the industry suggests producers typically include characters that are older than the target audience in the belief that children like to watch children older than themselves as a form of anticipatory socialization (Jordan, 1996). In terms of the times the programs aired as an indicator, on weekdays, shows that aired during school hours (9:00 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.) were usually for pre-school aged children as children of other ages are not likely to be in the audience. Shows aired immediately before and after school hours were considered likely to be targeted to elementary and early middle school-aged children (5-11). Shows aired in the late afternoon and evening were considered likely to be for adolescents. On weekends, pre-school programs air the earliest (6:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m.), followed by elementary school-aged programming (8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.), and then the teen programs (10:00 a.m. to 12 noon). These three criteria were just indicators, however, meant to guide judgments.

Figure 5: Audience for Children's Programming



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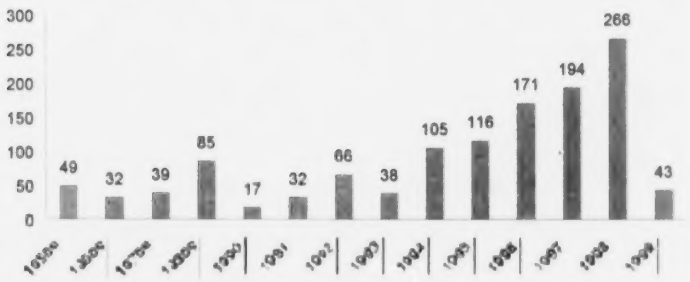
The elementary age audience remains the prime target for programmers with almost three-quarters of the shows targeted at this group. Another 21 percent of programs targeted the preschool audience. Only seven percent of programs targeted teenagers. These figures are virtually unchanged from last year when 69 percent, 23 percent, and eight percent targeted elementary-aged, preschool, and teen audiences respectively (Jordan, 1998). Programs rated TV-Y were significantly more likely to be targeted to preschoolers. However, some programs targeted to elementary-aged and teen-aged audiences received the TV-Y rating. Programs rated TV-Y7 were more likely to be targeted to elementary-aged or teen-aged audiences. TV-G shows were most likely to be targeted to elementary aged audiences and shows with other ratings were most likely for a teen audience.[7] Though much more sensitive analyses need to be done, the age-ratings seem to correspond well to our judgments about the audience for which the programs were intended.

Other Program Characteristics

Other programming characteristics worthy of mentioning are program length, program format, website promotion, and the year of program production. First with regard to program length, the overwhelming majority of the programs was thirty minutes in length (95 percent) with the rest being one hour in length. The majority (54 percent) of the programs was shown in one long segment. Thirteen percent of the shows were presented in two discrete segments. The remaining shows were broken into three or more discrete segments. In this age of merging technologies, the marriage between television and the Internet is well under way as 20 percent of the programs contained promotion for a show content-related website. Finally, to get a sense of when the programs aired during the 1998/99 season was produced, the copyright years of all the programs that listed one were recorded.[8] Years of production ranged from 1950, nearly the beginning of television, all the way to 1999, the current year, with the bulk produced in the 1990s. Figure 6 presents the distribution of the years when this season's programs were produced.

Figure 6: Years When Programs Were Produced



What Do Children's Programs Look Like?

The first part of this analysis addressed the *quantity* of children's programs, where the programs could be found, who they were for, how they were rated, along with other largely descriptive information about them generally. This part of the analysis turns to the *quality* of the programs available to the child audience by examining program content. In this examination, the report first presents a look at the content of the programs and then offers an index of the quality of the content.

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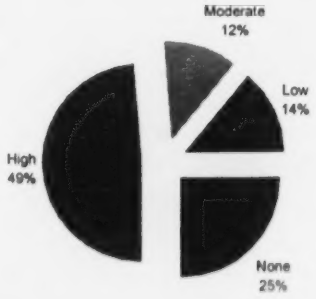
Educational Content

The mandate of the Children's Television Act of 1990 and the follow-up processing guideline of 1996 were intended to provide more educational programming for children. Thus, coders assessed the extent to which there were one or more positive lessons in the content of the programs that were explicit and clear and would "further the development of the child in any respect, including the child's cognitive/intellectual or emotional/social needs" (Federal Communications Commission, 1991, p. 2114). The types of lessons presented generally fell in one of three categories: knowledge/cognitive (e.g., historical facts or literacy skills); social/emotional (e.g., cooperation, coping with fears); or physical well-being (e.g., health, hygiene). In addition to assessing the presence of a clear lesson, coders also assessed the extent to which at least one lesson in each program was a salient aspect of the show -- consistently conveyed throughout it and integral to the program as a whole. The educational content of a program could be high, moderate, low or none. A high rating meant the lesson presented was both clear and well integrated throughout the presentation. A moderate rating meant that though the coder detected a lesson in the presentation, it was either not clear or not well integrated. A low rating meant the lesson was neither clear nor well integrated. If a program was without a lesson at all, it received a rating of none.

Figure 7: Educational Content of Children's Programming



As indicated in Figure 7, 49 percent of programs had high educational content, 12 percent had moderate educational content, 14 percent had low educational content and 25 percent had no educational content. While a comparison between this year's educational strength measure and last year's cannot be made because of a change in the manner in which the educational strength variable is computed,[9] the components of the measure, clarity of lesson and salience of lesson can be compared. Last year 46 percent of children's programs had no lesson (Jordan, 1998). This year, the percentage of educationally impoverished programs dropped to 25 percent.[10] It appears that the less educational programs are being weeded from programmer schedules.

Where are the educational programs?

This year, high educational content programs were significantly more likely to be found on basic cable channels (46 percent of all programs with high educational content) and PBS stations (35 percent of all programs with high educational content) than other categories of venues. Broadcast independents (two percent of all programs with high educational content) and broadcast weblets (two percent of all programs with high educational content) were significantly less likely to have programs with high educational content.[11] The individual venue with the most offerings with high educational content was the PBS group of stations followed by Nickelodeon and Disney as presented in Figure 8.

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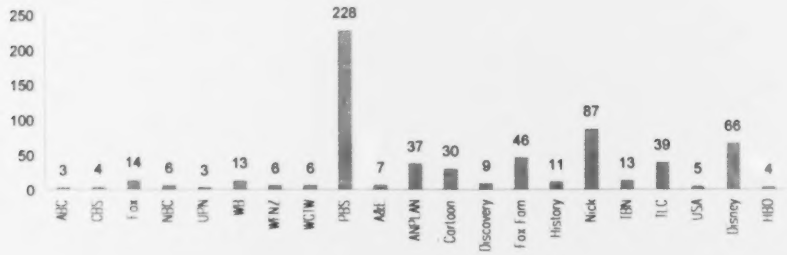
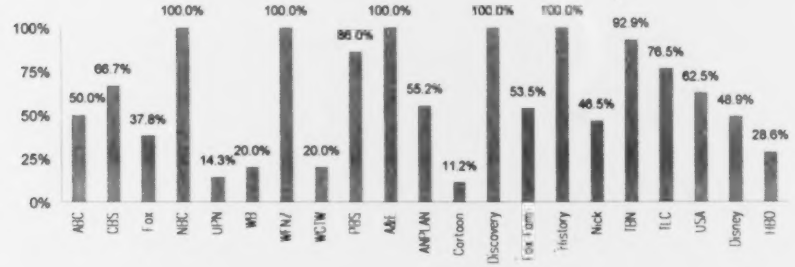
Figure 8: Number of Educational Programs by Venue



It may not be fair to compare venues that air children's programming around the clock (e.g., Nickelodeon) to venues that have designated children's programming blocks (e.g., commercial broadcast channels). Figure 9 presents the proportion of children's programs offered by each individual venue[12] that has clear and salient educational messages. As Figure 9 depicts, a diverse mixture of venues devotes all of their children's programming to shows with high educational content: the broadcast network channel NBC; the broadcast independent channel WFMZ; and the basic cable channels A&E, the Discovery Channel, and the History Channel.

Figure 9: Percentage of Educational Shows by Venue



For whom are the educational programs?

Programs with clear and salient lessons are more likely to be for preschool and teen audiences and less likely to be for elementary-aged audiences.[13] Eighty-one percent and 60 percent of the preschool programs and teen shows had high educational content respectively compared to only 39 percent of the elementary-aged programs that reside in that category.

Are programs produced more recently more likely to be educational?

An interesting question is whether or not programs produced in the 1990s when there was such a change in the regulatory environment are significantly different in terms of their educational content than shows produced prior to those changes. Programs aired in the current season that were produced before 1990 were significantly less educational than programs produced after 1990.[14] Of the shows produced prior to the 1990s that were aired in the 1998/99 season, none of those produced in the 1950s and 1960s were educational, 13 percent of those produced in the 1970s and 31 percent of those produced in the 1980s were educational. The average percentage of programs with clear and salient lessons produced each year after 1990 was 54 percent, with programs produced in 1995 being particularly educational (87 percent had clear and salient lessons) and those produced in 1992 not

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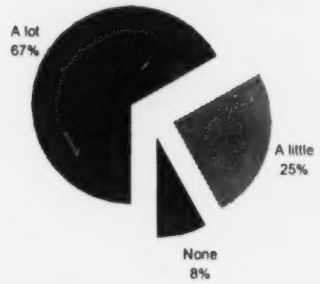
being particularly educational (eight percent had clear and salient lessons). It must be strongly cautioned that the results presented in this analysis are not indicative of absolute changes in children's programming over time as the collection of programs produced in each year are not necessarily representative of the entire year of programming. However, given programmers' interest in attracting the largest possible audience with their offerings, it is likely that the shows from previous years are the best of those years' offerings.

Character Diversity

It has long been recognized that television is rather homogenous in its depictions of people from various backgrounds (Graves, 1993, 1996; Gerbner, 1994; Greenberg & Brand, 1994; Geiogamah & Pavel, 1993; Hamamoto, 1993; Subervi-Velez & Colsant, 1993; Signorielli, 1993; Kovaric, 1993; Makas, 1993). Graves (1996) quips, "As it is often pointed out, the social world of television is predominantly European American, middle-class, and male, regardless of the type of programming examined" (p. 63). It has also been recognized that children benefit from seeing themselves in the media (Greenberg & Brand, 1994). To examine the extent to which children do in fact see themselves in significant roles in the programs they watch, coders evaluated the diversity of the characters presented. As in past years (Jordan, 1996; Jordan & Woodard, 1997; Jordan, 1998), only two elements of diversity were explicitly examined, gender and ethnicity.

For gender, coders evaluated the extent to which children's programs conveyed social diversity through the gender of their characters. Characters were any animate beings, including animals and extra-terrestrials. Programs were considered to have "a lot" of gender diversity if there was significant representation (at least 33 percent of the minority gender) of both males and females among major characters, throughout the program (most or all scenes). A program was considered to have "a little" gender diversity if there was gender diversity (both males and females are represented), but the diversity was relegated to only token major characters, only minor (but speaking) characters, or the diversity was not integrated throughout the program. Finally, a program was rated to have no gender diversity if there was no significant representation of both males and females among any characters or the diversity was relegated to minor characters with non-speaking roles.

Figure 10: Gender Diversity in Children's Programming



As depicted in Figure 10, 67 percent of the programs had "a lot" of gender diversity, 25 percent had "a little" gender diversity, and eight percent of the shows for children had no gender diversity. These proportions are virtually unchanged from last year's analysis (Jordan, 1998). Programs for preschoolers were most likely to have significant representation of both males and females in major characters (87 percent of the shows had "a lot" of gender diversity versus 62 percent for elementary-aged programs and 63 percent for teen-aged shows).[15] Broadcast network channels and PBS offerings were most likely to have shows with significant representation of both males and females in major characters (89

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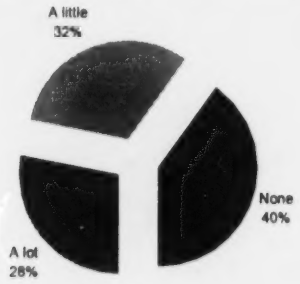
percent and 86 percent of the shows had "a lot" of gender diversity respectively). Broadcast weblets and broadcast independents were least likely to air programs with "a lot" of gender diversity characters (49 percent and 53 percent of the shows had "a lot" of gender diversity respectively). [16]

In a similar fashion, for ethnicity, coders evaluated the extent to which the program conveyed social diversity by including characters of different races and ethnicity. References to ethnicity included characters' accents, traditional clothing, and skin color if human. Programs were considered to have "a lot" of ethnic diversity if there was significant representation (at least 33 percent of the minority ethnic group or race) of different ethnic groups and/or races among major characters, throughout the program (most or all scenes). A program was considered to have "a little" ethnic diversity if there was ethnic diversity, but the diversity was relegated to only token major characters, only minor (but speaking) characters, or the diversity was not throughout the program. Finally, a program was rated to have no ethnic diversity if there was only one ethnicity or race presented, the diversity was relegated to minor characters with non-speaking roles, or there were only non-human characters without ethnic markers.

As presented in Figure 11, only 28 percent of children's programs had "a lot" of ethnic diversity, 32 percent had "a little" ethnic diversity, and 40 percent of the programs had no ethnic diversity.[17] Programs for preschoolers and teens were most likely to have significant representation of different ethnic groups or races among major characters (49 percent of the shows had "a lot" of ethnic diversity and 48 percent for teen-aged shows versus 19 percent for elementary-aged programs).[18] PBS outlets and broadcast network channels were most likely to have shows with significant representation of different ethnic groups or races in major characters (55 percent and 51 percent of the shows on these outlets had "a lot" of ethnic diversity respectively). Broadcast weblets and basic cable channels were least likely to air programs with "a lot" of ethnically diverse characters (11 percent and 18 percent of the shows on these venues had "a lot" of ethnic diversity respectively). [19]

Figure 11: Ethnic Diversity in Children's Programming



Violence

In addition to examining the qualities in children's program that are likely to be beneficial to the development of the child, this report examined the qualities that are likely to be harmful. The first category that assessed potentially harmful content was violence. For violence, coders evaluated the overt depiction of an intentional and malicious threat of physical force or the actual use of such force to seriously injure an animate being or group of beings (Kunkel, 1997; Gerbner & Gross, 1976). Violence includes depictions of physically harmful consequences against an animate being or group that occur as a result of unseen violent means. Violence also includes instances of verbal descriptions of physical aggression directed against an animate character who may or may not be present to hear the threat. Finally, violence was counted if it occurred in a "story within a story."

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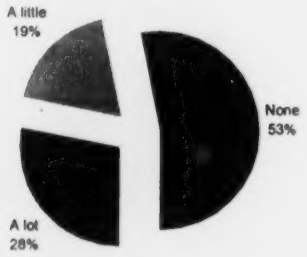
Coders judged a program to have "a lot" of violence if there were four or more complete acts of violence in the program (e.g., a fight counted as one act or instance of violence even though numerous punches and/or threats may have been exchanged within the fight). A program was judged to have "a little" violence if there were one to three instances of violence in the program. Obviously, a "none" was given to programs without any violence at all.

Figure 12: Violence in Children's Programming

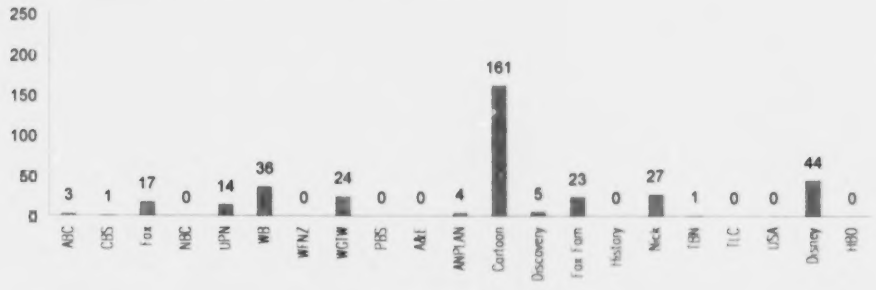


Just over a quarter of children's programs were judged to have "a lot" of violence and just over a half were judged to have no violence at all. Despite the use of a more liberal measurement scale this year,[20] violence appears to be down slightly from last year when about a third of the programs analyzed had "a lot" of violence in them (Jordan, 1998). Almost identical to last year, 74 percent of programs with "a lot" of violence do not get the "FV" content rating they should.

Where are the violent programs?

The broadcast independent stations had the highest proportion of highly violent programs at 67 percent followed by the broadcast weblets with 58 percent of their shows being judged to have "a lot" of violence. PBS had no programs with "a lot" of violence. The individual venue[21] with the most violent programs was by far the Cartoon Network followed by Disney as presented in Figure 13. A number of venues did not have any violent programs: the broadcast network NBC, the broadcast independent WFMZ, PBS, the basic cable channels A&E, History Channel, TLC, and USA, and the premium cable channel HBO.

Figure 13: Number of Programs with "A Lot" of Violence by Venue



To put this violent programming in context, Figure 14 presents the proportion of children's programs offered by each individual venue that was deemed to have "a lot" of violence. As Figure 14 depicts, a diverse mixture of venues "devotes" half or more of all its children's programming to shows with four or more acts of violence: the broadcast network channel ABC (50 percent); the broadcast independent

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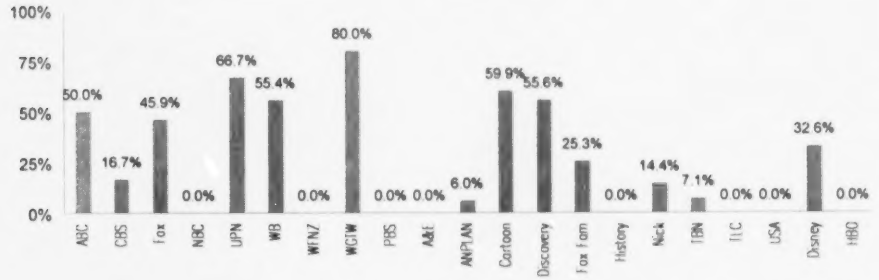
channel WGTW (80 percent); and the basic cable channels the Cartoon Network (60 percent), and the Discovery Channel (56 percent).

Figure 14: Percentage of Shows with "A Lot" of Violence by Venue

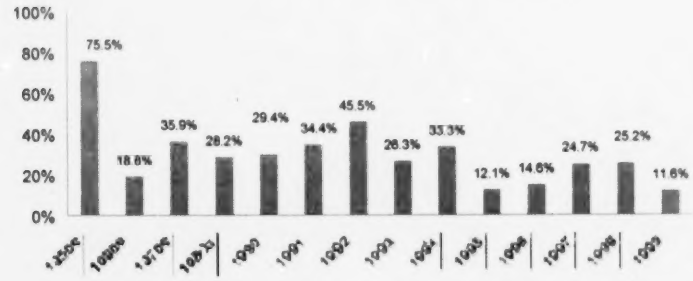


For whom are the violent programs made?

Programs with "a lot" of violence are more likely to be for elementary-aged and teen audiences and less likely to be for preschool audiences.[22] Thirty-four percent and 39 percent of the elementary-aged and teen shows were judged to have "a lot" of violence respectively. None of the preschool programs were judged to have "a lot" of violence.

Are programs produced more recently less likely to be violent?

Figure 15: Percentage of Shows with "A Lot" of Violence by Year of Production



As with the educational content of programs, an interesting question is whether or not programs produced in the 1990s when there was such a dramatic change in the regulatory environment are significantly different in terms of their violent content than shows produced prior to those changes. As shown in Figure 15, there appears to be a somewhat of a drop in the percentage of violent shows depending on when the programs were produced.

Programs aired in the 1998/99 season that were produced more recently seem to be somewhat less violent than those produced earlier. Again, caution should be used in the interpretation of the results presented in this analysis, as they are not indicative of absolute changes in children's programming over time.

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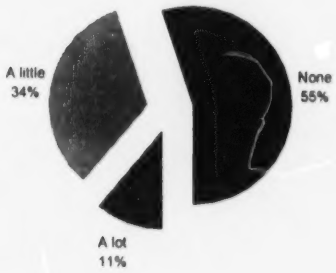
Language

Coders also evaluated the extent to which characters in children's programs used problematic language. Problematic language was defined as the extent to which characters used uncontradicted words or phrases as a form of disrespect (anything that fails to take into account the feelings of another or shows disdain for authority) or animosity where the intent is to be emotionally hurtful to specific characters in the program. Programs with four or more instances of problematic language were considered to have "a lot" of problematic language. Those with one to three instances of the "bad" language were considered to have "a little" problematic language. Obviously, those without any problematic language were given a "none." Overall, 11 percent of the shows designed for children had "a lot" of problematic language, 34 percent had "a little" problematic language and 55 percent had no "bad" language as illustrated in Figure 16. This distribution is not significantly different than last year's when overall six percent of programs had "a lot" of problematic language, 36 percent had "a little," and 59 percent had no problem language at all (Jordan, 1998).

Problematic language was most prevalent on broadcast weblets where 26 percent of the programs offered had "a lot" of the language. PBS stations had no programs with problematic language. Both elementary-aged and teen-aged programs were more likely to have at least some "bad language" as 52 percent and 65 percent had "a little" or more problem language respectively. Eighty-seven percent of preschool shows had no problem language at all.[23]

Figure 16: Problematic Language in Children's Programming



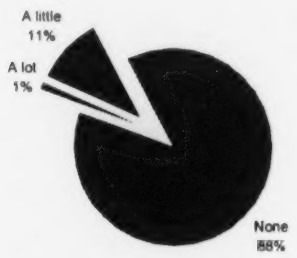
Sexual Innuendo and Provocative Dress

In the last objective content category evaluated, coders assessed the prevalence of sexual innuendo and provocative dress. Although there is usually no explicit sex in television, sexual innuendo is rampant (Harris, 1994). The question is how much sexual innuendo seeps into programming for children? To answer this question, coders examined the extent to which explicit sexual references (allusions to sex, activities associated with sex like kissing, caressing, and other "foreplay," or explicit attempts through dress or behavior to lure someone into such activity) were made through verbal comments (or soundtracks) or visual images. Coders did not code a chaste kiss as sexual innuendo. Programs with four or more instances of sexual innuendo were considered to have "a lot" of sexual innuendo. Those with one to three instances of the sexual references were considered to have "a little" sexual innuendo. Those without any sexual innuendo were given a "none" for this type of content.

There certainly was not much innuendo in children's television, but there was some. As illustrated in Figure 17, only one percent of programs had "a lot" of innuendo, 11 percent had "a little," and 88 percent had no sexual innuendo at all. Rare as it was, when it did occur it was most likely to be on a teen program where 10 percent of shows had "a lot" of innuendo and 33 percent had "a little."[24]

Broadcast network venues were most likely to air programs with innuendo with six percent of their offerings having "a lot" of it and 20 percent having at least "a little." [25]

Figure 17: Sexual Innuendo in Children's Programming



Assessing the Quality of Programming Available to Children

The Annenberg Public Policy Center's quality index measures the extent to which programs include potentially enriching content and exclude potentially harmful content. The criteria for the index were initially developed in 1996 (see Jordan, 1996) from a review of the literature on the effects of television on children and interviews with advocates and children's television industry executives. The original measure had three components, quality contributors, quality detractors, and a subjective quality assessment. Quality contributors included the age appropriateness, educational content, character diversity, and production value. Quality detractors included the presence of violence, sexual innuendo, stereotyping, problematic language, and unsafe behaviors. The subjective quality assessment had coders rate their general impression of the programs as either a positive, neutral, or negative overall.

In consultation with our advisory groups,[26] the quality index was refined in our subsequent analyses (see Jordan & Woodard, 1997; Jordan, 1998) to include only the quality contributor, educational content, the quality detractor, violence and the subjective assessment. It was argued that these criteria reflect substantial research findings that indicate programs designed to be educational are generally beneficial to children (Anderson, 1998) and that violence in children's programs may be detrimental (Dubow & Miller, 1996; Gunter, 1994).

In light of continuing concerns about character diversity in children's programs (Graves, 1996), the sexual content available to children (Huston, Wartella & Donnerstein, 1998), and concerns about language meant to inflict emotional harm on another, these three items were resurrected in the 1999 APPC quality index.

The 1999 quality index consists of the following eight dimensions:

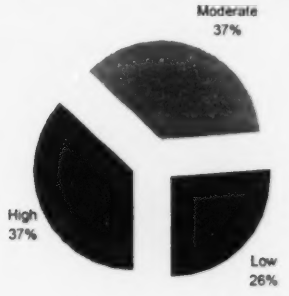
- Clear Lesson – The extent to which there are one or more positive lessons (traditional academic or prosocial) in the content of the program that are explicit and clear and would "further the development of the child in any respect, including the child's cognitive/intellectual or emotional/social needs" (Federal Communications Commission, 1991, p. 2114).
- Integration of Lesson – The extent to which at least one lesson is a salient aspect of the program, consistently conveyed and integral to the program as a whole.
- Gender Diversity – The extent to which a program conveys social diversity through its significant representation of both males and females.

- Ethnic Diversity – The extent to which a program conveys social diversity through its significant representation of people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds.
- Violence – The extent to which the program contains the overt depiction of an intentional and malicious threat of physical force or the actual use of such force to seriously injure an animate being or group of beings.
- Problematic Language – The extent to which characters used words or phrases as a form of disrespect or animosity where the intent is to be emotionally hurtful to specific characters in the program.
- Sexual Innuendo – The extent to which explicit sexual references were made through verbal comments, soundtracks, or visual images.
- Overall Subjective Assessment – The extent to which coders had the impression that the program, on the whole, is one that is negative (significant problematic content with little or no redeeming value), neutral (little or no problematic or beneficial content or any problematic content is balanced by countervailing positive content), or positive (an enriching program that would likely be beneficial to the target audience).

Programs received high quality index scores for containing clear and salient messages (combined to form the educational content measure discussed earlier), gender and ethnic diversity, no violence, problematic language, or sexual innuendo, and positive subjective assessments. The "objective measure" was composed of educational content (clear lesson and integration of lesson combined), gender diversity, ethnic diversity, violence, problematic language, and sexual innuendo.[27] The total objective scores ranged from zero to 14. The "subjective measure," defined as negative, neutral, and positive ratings, ranged from zero to 14 as well. The objective and subjective measures were summed to create the overall quality index, ranging from zero to 28.[28] Programs were recoded into three categories: low quality, moderate quality and high quality.[29]

By these standards, 26 percent of the programs available to children were "low quality," 37 percent were " moderate quality," and 37 percent were "high quality." See Appendix A for a list of high quality programs. Though the indices are not identical and comparisons should be made with caution, it does appear that the proportion of low quality programs has decreased slightly from the 1997/98 season when 36 percent of the programs were rated "low quality (Jordan, 1998)."[30] The proportion of high quality programs was virtually unchanged from last year when 36 percent of the programs were rated as such.

Figure 18: Quality of Children's Programming

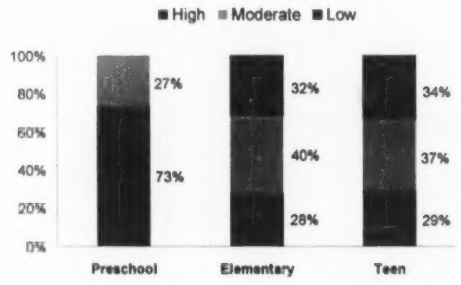


For Whom Are the Quality Programs?

High quality programs were more likely to be preschool programs.[31] Of all the preschool programs, 73 percent are high quality compared to proportions of 28 percent and 29 percent for elementary-aged

and teen-aged programs respectively. The distribution of quality programs for children of different ages was quite similar to the distribution found last year when 85 percent of the preschool programs were high quality, 21 percent of the elementary-aged shows were high quality, and 28 percent of the teen programs were high quality (Jordan, 1998). In fact, the prevalence of high quality programming for preschoolers is a trend we have seen throughout our analyses of children's television (Jordan, 1996; Jordan & Woodard, 1997).

Figure 19: Quality of Programming Available in Different Age Groups



In addition to assessing the quality of programming available to children in the target audience (see Appendix D), we can also use the age ratings as a means of specifying the intended audience and evaluating the quality of programs available for the audience. Over half (52 percent) of the programs rated suitable for children of all ages (TV-Y) were high quality, but only 13 percent of the programs deemed suitable for children over the age of seven (TV-Y7) and 17 percent of the general audience programs (TV-G) were the same. About two-thirds (67 percent) of the TV-Y7 programs were low quality. TV-G programs were most likely to be moderate quality.[32] These results are similar to last year's when 53 percent of the TV-Y programs, 14 percent of the TV-Y7 programs, and five percent of the TV-G programs were rated high quality (Jordan, 1998).

When Do Quality Programs Air?

High quality programs were most likely to be aired in the morning, between 7:00 am and 12 noon, where almost half of the programs offered received high marks.[33] As Figure 20 illustrates, as the day goes on, the quality of children's programs drops significantly. Disappointingly, only four percent (3 shows) of the shows aired during the evening "prime-time" hours were high quality when children are most likely to be in the audience. Two of the programs were aired by Nickelodeon (*Nick News* airs Sundays at 8:30 pm; *Journey of Allen Strange* airs Wednesdays at 8:30 pm) and one show is aired on the Disney Channel (*Omba Mokomba* airs Sundays at 7:00 pm).

Perhaps a sign of moving on up from the ghetto days of children's television (when programs for children could only be found on Saturday mornings), high quality programs are no more or less likely to be aired on weekends (32 percent of shows are high quality) than they are to be aired on weekdays (38 percent of shows are high quality).[34] The fact that morning and early afternoon shows are more likely to be higher quality and that there is no difference in quality between weekend and weekday programming is mostly a reflection of preschool programming that is often high quality, aired in the mornings and early afternoons, and are on throughout the week.

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Figure 20: Quality of Programming Available by Time

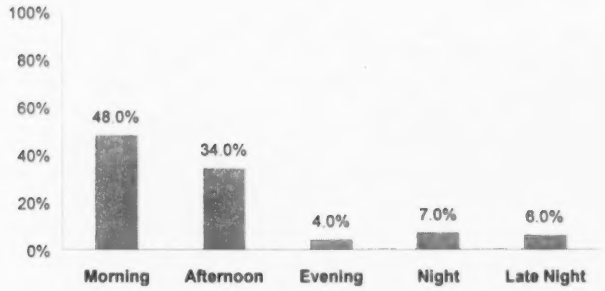
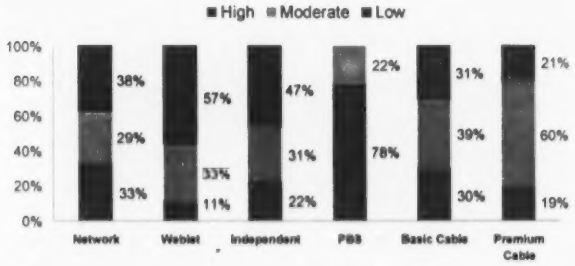


Figure 20 Note: Morning (between 5:00 am and 12 noon), Afternoon/early evening (between 12 noon – 6:00 pm) Evening (between 7:00 pm – 10:00 pm), Night (between 10:00 pm and 12 midnight), and Late night (between 12 midnight and 5:00 am)

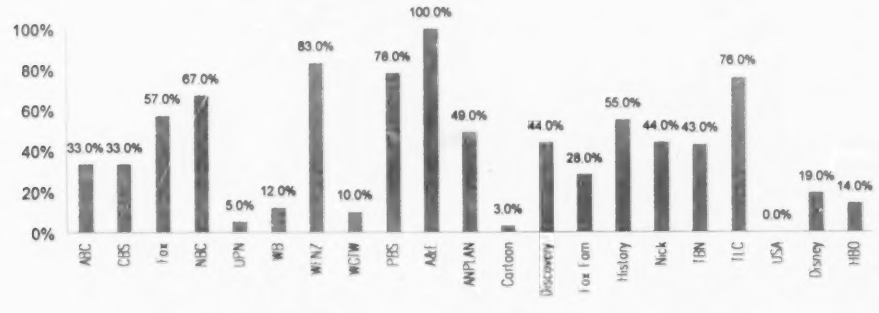
Where Are the Quality Programs?

Figure 21: Quality of Programming Available in Different Venues



Public broadcasting stations remain the venues of choice for high quality programming (Jordan, 1998) as over three-quarters (78 percent) of PBS offerings are high quality. Once again, the broadcast weblets air the smallest proportion of quality programs for children with only 11 percent of their shows rated high quality and 57 percent of their

Figure 22: Percentage of High Quality Shows by Venue



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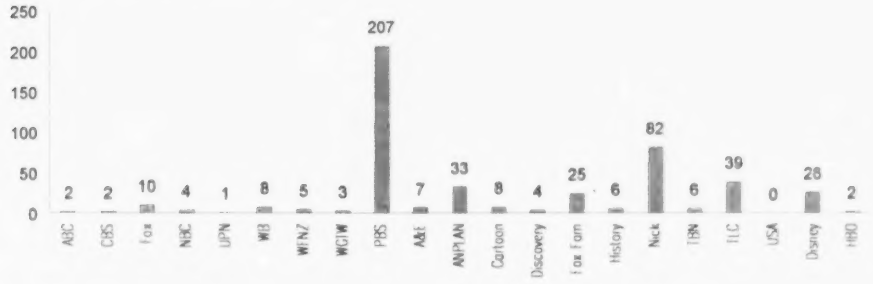
shows rated low quality.[35] Figure 21 presents the distribution of quality programs by venue category while Figures 22 and 23 present the quality of programs by individual venues.

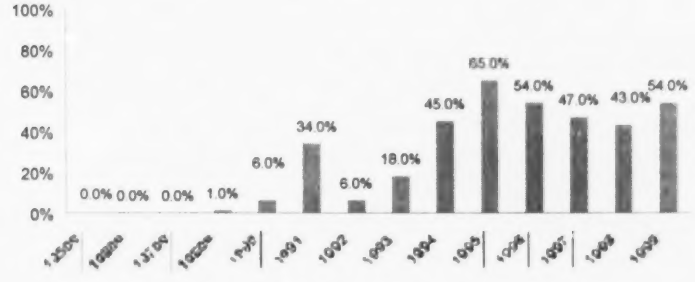
Figure 23: Number of High Quality Shows by Venue



Has quality improved over the years?

To examine whether the changes in the regulatory environment have influenced the quality of programs, the amount of high quality programs produced in different years but aired in the current season was compared. As depicted in Figure 24, programs aired in the current season that were produced after 1990 were more likely to be of high quality than programs produced prior to that time.[36] None of the programs produced in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s were of high quality. A significant proportion of programs produced each year after 1994 was high quality. The results presented in this analysis are not indicative of absolute changes in children's programming over time as the collection of programs produced in each year are not necessarily representative of the entire year of programming.

Figure 24: Percentage of High Quality Shows by Year of Production



How do popular shows with children compare to children's programs?

There is a disjuncture between children's programs and what children watch. Sometimes they coview with parents or other adult caretakers and watch whatever their caretaker watches (Dorr & Rabin, 1995). In some cases, it is because when children are available to view, there are no children's programs available. The point of this final analysis is to compare the quality of programs children watch to the quality of general children's programs.

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The Programs Children Watch

Table 1 presents a snapshot of the most watched programs by children between the ages of 2 and 17 just over a month after the 1998/99 season started. [37]

Table 1: Top Twenty Most Watched Show By Children

Rank	Show	Network	Rating
1	Sabrina the Teenage Witch	ABC	10.7
2	Boy Meets World	ABC	10.0
3	Two of a Kind	ABC	8.9
4	Brother's Keeper	ABC	8.6
5	Wonderful World of Disney[a]	ABC	7.0
6	Simpsons	Fox	6.8
7	Guinness World Records: Primetime	Fox	6.3
8	Friends	NBC	5.2
9	That 70s Show[b]	Fox	4.7
10	Disney's One Saturday Morning 3[c,d]	ABC	4.6
10	X-Files	Fox	4.6
12	Wild Thornberrys[c]	Nickelodeon	4.4
13	7th Heaven	WB	4.3
13	World's Wildest Police Videos	Fox	4.3
15	Disney's One Saturday Morning 2[c,d]	ABC	4.2
15	Hey Arnold![c]	Nickelodeon	4.2
17	Drew Carey Show	ABC	3.9
17	Jesse	NBC	3.9
19	Dawson's Creek	WB	3.8
19	Disney's One Saturday Morning 1[c,d]	ABC	3.8

[a] ABC aired a series of family-friendly feature films like *Flubber* during this two hour block. The movies were excluded from this analysis.
[b] Aired only in the first half of the season.
[c] Program designed specifically for children.
[d] Disney's One Saturday Morning represents a programming block of three shows, *Disney's Doug*, *Disney's Recess* and *Disney's Pepper Ann*, along with educational interstitials.

As Table 1 indicates five (25 percent) of the most watched programs by children are programs specifically designed for children. The rest are prime-time shows that air primarily between 8 pm and 9 pm in the Philadelphia media market. The top four programs (*Sabrina the Teenage Witch*, *Boy Meets World*, *Two of a Kind*, and *Brother's Keeper*) are a part of ABC's TGIF programming block that runs on Friday evenings between 8 pm and 10 pm. Of the children's programs that made the top twenty, three are a part of ABC's popular One Saturday Morning programming block (*Disney's Doug*, *Disney's Recess* and *Disney's Pepper Ann*). The other two children's programs are Nickelodeon offerings (*Wild Thornberrys* and *Hey Arnold!)* that run during prime-time as well as on weekends. Two programs clearly marketed to teen audiences but designed for general audiences are WB's *7th Heaven* and *Dawson's Creek*.

How do these popular programs compare?

These top-rated programs were subjected to the same evaluation as the general children's programs. Only one of the top-rated programs was considered high quality (*Disney's Pepper Ann*). Overall, the top-rated programs were more likely to be considered moderate in quality.[38] A bit more of the top rated programs were considered low quality shows (31 percent) then the general programs (27 percent) but the difference did not appear significant. An interesting note is that these "most watched" programs by children are significantly less likely to contain "a lot" of violence than the programs that are specifically designed for children.

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PART THREE: SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Though it took nearly half a century, there are now regulations on the books that hold broadcasters accountable for providing a minimum amount of educational children's programming. Lawmakers have demanded through the "Three-Hour Rule" that broadcasters devote a portion, albeit small, of their programming schedules to quality shows for children. Lawmakers have also mandated that parents have a means to block objectionable content from coming into their homes. Through the V-Chip and the accompanying voluntary rating system, parents can potentially identify appropriate programming for their children and safeguard them from potentially harmful content over the free airwaves.

The good news for the broadcaster is that, despite declining viewership, the revenues from advertising and most likely other income streams are increasing. Broadcasters can do the "right thing" with less fear of financial repercussions. Perhaps in response to this win-win situation, more players have entered the already crowded field of children's programming. A possible consequence of the increase in outlets for children's programs will be increased competition. With increased competition comes the potential for increased quality.

There may be evidence in the 1998/99 season of children's programs that the burgeoning supply of shows is improving the overall quality. There are 12 percent more shows in a week for children this year than were in last year's composite week of programming. Since the proportion of high quality programs is the same this year as it was last year, there are more high quality programs available for children this season.

In addition to there being more good stuff, there is less bad stuff. Though modest, the percentage of overall low quality programs has decreased from a third to a quarter. It seems that the bottom dwellers of years past are being chased out by the competitive market and crowded out by the mandate to provide more quality programming. Though the big three of yesteryear (ABC, CBS, and NBC) offer children a rather limited menu of programming, the shows they do offer appear to be mostly healthy. However, all this may mean is that they are barely complying with the minimum requirements of the "Three-Hour Rule." The overall quality of "big three" programs still has a ways to go.

Finally, it is clear that the programs produced more recently are of a higher quality than those produced before the 1990s.

Areas that still need work

These are still tumultuous times in children's programming. There is significant turnover of children's programs throughout the course of a season making it difficult for children and parents to get a fix on what is available, good or bad. One impediment is the lack of uniformity and consistency in the application of the age and content ratings. The application of the ratings is not uniform. Two venues have publicly refused to use the content ratings in the labeling of their shows, NBC and BET (Albiniak, 1999). In addition, stations do not consistently apply age and content ratings. Ten percent of children's programs are still not given age ratings. The biggest culprits were broadcast independent stations that failed to rate 75 percent of their programs and PBS venues that failed to rate 30 percent of their offerings. Though not excused, the rating inconsistencies are not as egregious as they might be because: 1) "Un-rated" shows were mostly (55 percent) high quality; and 2) The failure to rate programs by these stations may be attributable to the limited resources at their disposal. Despite these qualifications, it is important that these venues consistently rate their shows so that parents can "program in" these high quality programs that are appropriate for their children, particularly when the V-Chip finds its way into American homes. Perhaps the most significant problem with the implementation of the ratings system has been the inconsistent use of the FV (Fantasy Violence) rating. The FV rating should accompany any children's program with more than mild violence. In this analysis,

74 percent of programs with four or more instances of violence, which qualifies as more than mild violence, were not given the FV rating. All of these programs will slip through the V-Chip device. Children and their parents will not know about the content until they are exposed to it.

A second problem has to do with the programming behavior of some of the relatively 'new'-comers to children's television, UPN, The Cartoon Network, Fox, and WB. These young outlets appear to be staking their claim to the child audience by taking the low road. All of these venues air more low quality programs than programs of any other type and collectively out of 29 channels these four account for two-thirds of all the low quality programming. UPN was perhaps the worst as 85 percent of its programs were low quality.

Third, more programming needs to be made available for children during the prime-time hours (7pm – 10pm). During this time the highest percentage (between 25 percent and 45 percent depending on age) of children are in the audience, but almost the lowest percent (six percent) of programs designed specifically for them air. The only time when there are fewer shows is at night (10:00 pm to 12 midnight) when only two percent of children's programs air. Of the smattering of programs that air for children during the prime-time hours, only four percent can be considered high quality, a total of three shows.

Fortunately, the analysis of what children do watch reveals that the mostly prime-time programs are not terrible– but they are not great either. A review of the programs most watched by children suggests that: 1) The shows that children like are not rife with sex, violence, and bad language; and 2) Children prefer youth-oriented programming. That the programs children liked were not filled with negative content was demonstrated by the fact that most of the "most watched" programs were rated moderate in quality. While they may have had a bit of problematic content, it certainly was not as extensive as it was in some of the specifically designed for children programs. That children prefer youth-oriented programming is evidenced by the fact that most (60 percent) target youth. Five of the programs are specifically designed for children, the top four programs are a part of the ABC's TGIF line-up that is full of youth characters acting out the trials and tribulations of growing up, the two WB programs are marketed to teens, and the *Wonderful World of Disney* regularly features movies (e.g., *Flubber*) that are popular with young audiences. This should be a sign to broadcasters and cablecasters that if they exert the effort and resources to make and air good shows for children when they are in the audience, children will watch.

Finally, the quarter of children without access to cable (Stanger & Gridina, 1999) are missing out on a significant proportion of programming specifically designed for them and more importantly are denied the venue with the most educational programming.
As many observers of the children's television industry indicate, programming for children is on its way to realizing its potential, but still has some ground to cover (Jordan, 1999). From the analysis of the 1998/99 television season, five recommendations are appropriate:

- **More programmers should follow the lead of Nickelodeon and the Disney Channel and air quality programming during the prime-time viewing hours when the most children are in the audience.**

- **More consistency is needed in the information given to parents about the content and appropriateness of children's programs through the ratings.** In order for parents to guide their children in selecting appropriate programming, parents need to know what is in children's shows (particularly content that is potentially harmful) and for which of their children a show is appropriate. The V-Chip will be a less useful technology without uniform and consistent application of the age-based and content ratings.

- **More outreach to parents is necessary.** There are quality programs available for children, however APPC research indicates that parents are not aware of them (Stanger & Gridina, 1999). To continue the positive momentum observed in the 1998/99 season, a next step for the advocacy

community could be to make parents aware of quality programming and to encourage parents to become more involved in steering their children toward the quality shows. If parents do not become more involved in helping their children find quality shows, it is possible the quality shows will disappear.

To fill gaps in understanding that may influence programming decisions, answers to the following two research questions would be useful:

- **What is the educational value of youth- or family-oriented programming that is not specifically designed for children?** It appears that children are spending a lot of time with prime time, youth- or family-oriented programming on commercial broadcast stations. It may not be economically feasible for these venues to air programs specifically designed for children during the lucrative prime-time slots. The questions become "What are children taking away from these relatively child-friendly shows?" and "Can subtle changes be made to increase their educational value for children while maintaining their general appeal?" Increasing the quality of these popular prime-time programs may produce a mutually beneficial situation for children and commercial broadcasters.

- **How are children making their programming decisions?** Do children select what they watch through channel grazing? Do they watch shows parents and teachers recommend? Do they watch the shows about which they hear their friends talking? How can parents be more helpful? What information do parents need in order to be of greater assistance? Answers to these questions may provide insight into how to best bring quality programs to the intended audience.

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APPENDIX A: APPC HIGH QUALITY PROGRAMS

Program	Parental Endorsement	Child Endorsement	Industry Endorsement
A&E Biography for Kids	•		
A&E Classroom			
A&E New Explorers			
Acorn: The Nature Nut			
Adventures with Kanga Roddy			
All Dogs Go to Heaven: The Series			
Animated Hero Classics			
Arthur	•	•	•
Baby-Sitters' Club, The	•		
Barney & Friends	•		•
Bear in the Big Blue House	•		•
Big Bag			•
Big Comfy Couch	•		
Big Garage			
Bill Nye the Science Guy	•		•
Bingo & Molly			
Bloopy's Buddies			
Blue's Clues	•		•
Bug Juice			
Busy World of Richard Scarry, The			
Captain Planet and the Planeteers			
Click			
Disney's Pepper Ann			•
Disney's Sing Me a Story With Belle			
Donut Man			
Eastman Curtis			
Eddie Files, The			
Faithville			
Famous Jett Jackson, The			
Field Trip			
Field Trips USA			
Flying Rhino Junior High			
Franklin	•		•
Going Wild			
Groundling Marsh			
Hang Time			•
Hey Dude			
Homer's Workshop			
In the Beginning			
Inspector Gadget's Field Trip			
Jaws & Claws			
Jay Jay the Jet Plane			
Jim Henson's Animal Show			
Journey of Allen Strange, The			
Katie and Orbie			
Kids on the Move			
Knock Knock			
Lionhearts			
Little Bear	•		
Magic School Bus, The	•		•
Maisy			
Mega Movie Magic			
Mister Rogers' Neighborhood	•		•
Mother Nature			
Mystery Files of Shelby Woo, The			•
NBA Inside Stuff			
Nick News			•
Omba Mokomba			
Once upon a Tree			
Out of the Box			
Pappyland			
PB & J Otter			
Pee-wee's Playhouse			
Quigley's Village			
Reading Rainbow	•		•
Real Kids, Real Adventures			
Rupert			

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Program (continued)	Parental Endorsement	Child Endorsement	Industry Endorsement
Secret World of Alex Mack, The			
Sesame Street	•		•
Shamu TV			
Slow Norris, The			
Someday School			
Sports Illustrated for Kids			•
Squigglevision			•
Teen Court TV: What's the Verdict?			
Teen Summit			
Teletubbies	•	•	•
Tots TV			
Warner Bros. Histeria!			•
Where on Earth is Carmen Sandiego?			•
Why Why Family, The			
Wimzie's House	•		
Wubbulous World of Dr. Seuss, The			
Year by Year for Kids			
Zap It!			
Zoom	•	•	•

Parental Endorsement	Program was mentioned by parents as being "a good show for children" in our 1999 survey of parents and children (see Stanger & Gridina, 1999)
Child Endorsement	Program was mentioned as being a "favorite show" by children between the ages of 10-17 in our 1999 survey of parents and children (see Stanger & Gridina, 1999)
Industry Endorsement	Program was mentioned by an industry executive, an academic studying children's television, a children's television policy maker, or an advocate for children's television (see Jordan, 1999)

APPENDIX B: INTER-CODER RELIABILITY

To ensure that the judgments reported in this analysis are not the esoteric whims of individual coders, an inter-coder reliability analysis was performed. This analysis tells us how consistently coding decisions based on the content categories were made across coders. The reliability coefficient reported below is Krippendorff 's Alpha (Krippendorff, 1980). A rigorous test of reliability, the coefficient accounts for both chance agreement and disagreement. A Krippendorff 's Alpha of .65 or greater is passable. Below are the reliabilities for the content categories where coders made substantive decisions and achieved satisfactory reliability.

Measure	*Reliability Coefficient*
Program Format	.71
Targeted Age Group	.77
Lesson Clarity	.76
Lesson Salience	.76
Gender Diversity	.82
Ethnic Diversity	.66
Violence	.92
Sex & Innuendo	.66
Subjective Quality	.79

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APPENDIX C: PROGRAMMING VENUES

Venue Category	Channels
Broadcast Network	ABC, CBS, Fox, NBC
Broadcast Weblet	WB, UPN
Broadcast Independent	WFMZ, WGTW
PBS	WHYY, WLVT, WNJN, WYBE
Basic Cable	A & E, Animal Planet, BET, Court TV, Discovery, ESPN, ESPN2, EWTN, Fox Family Channel, History, Knowledge, MTV, Nick, TBN, TLC, Cartoon, USA
Premium Cable	Disney*, HBO

* The Disney Channel was in the process of becoming a basic channel in all of the Philadelphia area cable carriers at the time of program sampling.

APPENDIX D: PROGRAMMING FEATURES FOR CHILDREN OF DIFFERENT AGES

Preschool Child (2-4)	School-Aged Child (5-11)	Adolescent (12-16)
Both shows and tells the plot	Content is primarily concrete	Models deliberative process
Language must be simple	Moderate language, tough words defined	Depicts feelings and dilemmas facing this group
Repeats important themes	No abstractions	Encourages teens to ask questions and find answers
Pacing is slow	Main message is a part of the action of the program	Presents models that reflect the diverse reality teens face
Time is linear	Time is primarily linear	Challenging in its presentation
Spells out any TV conventions	TV conventions kept simple	Artfully uses TV conventions
No perspective changes	Limited perspective changes	Presents multidimensional characters

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END NOTES

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[1] There are at least two reasons for the differences between our data and the data Nielsen Media Research reports. 1) The samples are different. Nielsen's population is 2-11 year olds while our population is 10-17 year-olds. Teen viewing tends to bring average viewing down as teens in general watch less television than other youth age groupings. 2) The methodologies are different. Our data was collected through survey research. The Nielsen data was collected through a combination of people meters and diary reports.

[2] Most broadcast and cable outlets have agreed to participate in the voluntary rating system except for NBC and BET. See (Albiniak, 1999)

[3] As reported by Television Bureau of Advertising, Inc.

[4] Experience reveals that this approach yields extensive but not necessarily comprehensive results. It relies upon the programmers' self-identification of children's programs and the reporting of the programs identified as "for children" to television listing services. Failure to appropriately identify children's programs with TV listing services means that the programs were not likely included in this sample but they were also not likely to be found by their intended audience except by chance channel grazing. For example, this was the case with the Home Shopping Network. This venue happens to air children's programs but does not list them with any TV listing service and as a consequence its programs are not included in this analysis.

[5] As reported in Revision of Programming Policies for Television Broadcast Stations Report and Order, MM Docket N. 93-48, 96 FCC 2d 335, Appendix D.

[6] PBS and Independent Broadcast stations were significantly more likely to not rate their programs than other venues, Chi-Square = 561.61, df=20, p<. 001, Goodman and Kruskal tau = .13

[7] Chi-Square = 327.16, df=8, p<.001, Gamma = .46

[8] Could not determine the year of production for 5 percent of the programs.

[9] The educational content measure went from a three-category measure to a four-category measure. The high category is the same for both years, it is the other categories that have shifted a bit.

[10] Caution should still be used in making year to year comparison as except where noted, the content category definitions have not changed, but the coders employing those definitions have and as a consequence, there may be differences in the way different coding teams have interpreted and applied them.

[11] Chi-Square = 304.40, df=15, p<.001, Goodman and Kruskal tau = .10

[12] Individual venues that aired 5 or fewer children's programs were dropped from this analysis.

[13] Chi-Square = 187.61, df=6, p<.001, Gamma = -.47

[14] Chi-Square = 589.75, df=39, p<.001, Gamma = .30

[15] Chi-Square = 72.92, df=4, p<.001, Gamma = -.37

[16] Chi-Square = 94.42, df=10, p<.001, Gamma = .05

[17] Instead of marking "cannot code" for programs where ethnic group membership was ambiguous, coders were instructed to mark "none" as such programs could not convey a sense of an ethnically diverse world to children. Because such a high proportion of programs could not be coded in last year's sample, a comparison between this year's and last year's prevalence of ethnic diversity is not tenable.

[18] Chi-Square = 131.51, df=4, p<.001, Gamma = -.20

[19] Chi-Square = 236.11, df=10, p<.001, Gamma = .10

[20] In last year's analysis violence was measured in terms of scenes instead of instances. There are likely many more instances of violence than there are scenes with violence in them.

[21] See note 12.

[22] Chi-Square = 264.22, df=4, p<.001, Gamma = -.75

[23] Chi-Square = 146.31, df=4, p<.001, Gamma = -.61

[24] Chi-Square = 151.03, df=4, p<.001, Gamma = -.84

[25] Chi-Square = 59.63, df=10, p<.001, Goodman and Kruskal tau = .05

[26] This research is guided by two advisory committees: The Advisory Council on Excellence in Children's Television, which includes experts in such diverse fields as children's literature, demography, American

culture and documentary television; The Advisory Panel On Educational Television, whose members include developmental psychologists, a middle school principal, an educational historian and the former director of research for a highly regarded preschool program.

[27] Both a factor analysis and a reliability analysis confirm the suitability of combining these items in a single scale. The principal components factor analysis extracted 2 components, the first explaining 44 percent of the variance in the underlying component and the second explaining 15 percent of the variance in its component. All of the items loaded positively and significantly on the first factor. The second component merely reflects the presence of both quality detractors and quality contributors in the same scale as all the quality detractors loaded negatively on factor and all of the quality contributors loaded positively on the factor. The reliability analysis also suggested that the scale items reliably tapped a single construct as the overall scale had a Cronbach's Alpha of .80.

[28] The suitability of this combination was evaluated by the correlation of the scores. As the correlation was quite high r=.80, p<.001, the combination was deemed appropriate.

[29] Programs with quality scores of 0 to 13 were considered low quality; those with scores between 14 and 24 were considered to have moderate quality; and those with scores of 25 or higher were considered to have high quality. Substantively these judgements were based on the following: 1) In order to get a high rating programs had to get both a positive subjective rating (14) and high scores on all of the objective items (e.g., mostly 2's); 2) In order to get a moderate rating, a program had to get a neutral subjective rating (7) and at least ratings of "a little" (1's) on all of the objective measures; 3) The low quality programs got scores lower than those described in the moderate category.

[30] This comparison is not as tenuous as it may appear as the distribution of items added to scale are not significantly different than last year's distributions on the same items.

[31] Chi-Square = 204.47, df=12, p<.001, Gamma = -.36

[32] Chi-Square = 342.80, df=8, p<.001, Goodman and Kruskal tau = .12

[33] Chi-Square = 217.79, df=4, p<.001, Gamma = -.60

[34] Chi-Square = 4.36, df=2, n.s., Gamma = .12

[35] Chi-Square = 322.93, df=10, p<.001, Goodman and Kruskal tau = .12

[36] Chi-Square = 369.61, df=26, p<.001, Gamma = .30

[37] Nielsen Media Research (1998). "Ratings for the Child Audience (2-17) for the Week of November 2, 1998." Special Report to the Annenberg Public Policy Center.

[38] Chi-Square = 39.36, df=2, p<.001, Gamma = -.45

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